

## A Daughter of the West by Lindsey Anderson

My mother used to dance with the light of India and South Africa in her eyes.  
In the moonlight beneath the acacia trees, she would sway.  
She would bend and shake to some internal rhythm,  
an instinctive melody from her native lands pulsating in her head.  
The delicate gypsy chimes on her ankles filled the still night.  
I would watch my mother's graceful body move in the shadows,  
She was divinity at midnight.

But mother didn't talk of dancing,  
She coveted it in her heart, secret.  
She was eternally lost, too many identities competing inside her.  
She had given it up for the dream of America,  
for my father, for us, her daughters.

To my parents South Africa was the antithesis of America.  
My mother's hands have become raw with her subservient  
crawling path towards Western salvation.  
My father's mind was ruined with failed ideals.  
They would spend the rest of their lives chasing America.  
All of their disappointing, elusive dreams streaming out to the ocean,  
back to South Africa.

We would somehow be the redemption.  
Four American daughters.  
All citizens, all legitimate.

We are the daughters of a dancing Gypsy.  
An Indian woman relocated as a child to English South Africa,  
far from the scent and spice of Calcutta.  
She is a mixed breed with swirling black hair,  
dark skin with smooth complexion.  
It is through the soft spoken syllables,  
the ones that slip from her full lips,  
the language of the conquerors,  
that give her away for a foreigner.

My father has creamy light brown skin, like toffee.  
He speaks of yellowwood trees, red sand and blue ocean.  
Yet these yearnings in his heart he is ashamed of.  
He is the child of a forbidden affair.  
One between a white man and his African slave who cooked his dinners.  
He will never belong to South Africa.  
Always the bastard of her politics, Apartheid is the shadow in his eyes.

In America my father's eyes would disdainfully eye my mother.  
In South Africa, his hands had only loved her.  
In America she is his tie to the East, his constant reminder.  
In South Africa his heart will bleed forever.

Strive to be the best.  
A noble mantra, an American mantra.  
One my father could embrace fully and completely,  
one fit for Four American daughters.  
The West is in us, the children.  
The four daughters with slanting eyes and tanned skin.  
We would be the deliverance and the cost in all that was paid.

We are the product of desperate Western ideals,  
the chastised and jaded, rearranged and confused  
identities of a cleaning woman and horse breeder.  
America would promise it all and then take everything with both hands.  
South Africa will remember them, but America will possess them.

I have often asked why I have been lucky.  
Lucky enough to have drawn this hand at life and not another.  
To have and others to have not.  
I have been this lucky at the price of my parent's disillusionment.  
I owe it to the winds blowing with secrets of the East  
and the golden dawn of the West.  
Forces much darker than I ever imagined.

Los Angeles is our haven, our future, our savior.  
Our difference seems at once a bane and a blessing.  
We can blend into this city of color, yet we are exotic.  
A lawyer, a nurse, a journalist, an accountant,  
Father you can breathe, we are the result of America, of your eternal search.

I am a daughter of the West.  
The proud testament to her dark glory.  
I will be brilliance as the sun rises in western skies.  
I will never know South Africa.  
For me it will forever be the light in my mother's eyes  
and my father's reminiscing voice as he speaks of yellowwood trees.

I dance freely beneath acacia trees, a tribute to my mother.  
Smoggy LA skies stretch blue above me.  
I have while others have not,  
but I am the thankful, gracious winner.  
If not for the pain that hides behind my mother's eyes,  
if not for the suffering of her most intimate failures,  
this joy would be unknown.

